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THE CONCEPT OF COVENANT AND THE TEACHINGS OF
JESUS IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to attempt an appraisal of Jesus' understanding and view of the concept of covenant. In such an attempt it seems necessary to begin with a sketch of the development of covenantal awareness in Israel's history while defining the basis for such an awareness. Thus the first considerations are those of the meaning of covenant as understood by Israel as a nation through the interpretation of the prophets. This will be approached through a word study on ahabah and chesed. The historical consideration of the effect of prophetism upon the covenantal concept will cover only the roles of Hosea, Jeremiah and the Deuteronomic Code.

In approaching the actual topic under consideration, I will attempt to summarize Jesus' view of the covenant as it is recorded by the Synoptic Gospels and survey the implications of his understanding of the concept for his teaching. This necessitates an attempt to discover a Synoptic definition of Israel's purpose from the teachings of Jesus as well as attempting to define the nature and purpose of his ministry in relation to this national calling.

The final problem to be considered is the implication of Jesus the Messiah for the life of Israel, to what avail

is Jesus' role as Christ for those involved in responsible covenantal living and wherein lies the sanction for understanding the covenant in terms of the "Fatherhood of God". Finally, what is the significance of the covenantal consciousness of Jesus in terms of the ongoing life of the Church as seen through the Eucharistic words.

CHAPTER II

COVENANT IN ISRAEL

I. THE CONCEPT OF COVENANT

In examining linguistic evidence on the meaning of covenant, perhaps the most striking Hebrew words are ahabah and chesed. Briefly defined one may say that ahabah is "instituting" love and that chesed is "continuing" love. Though both concepts are a part of the covenantal relationship of Yahweh with Israel, each has its own linguistic sphere. Ahabah, further defined,¹ is unconditional and unconditioned love. The existence of ahabah is totally dependent on the will of the lover. There is no influence outside the lover which will alter ahabah. Ahabah has its place within the context of covenant as the force which initiates covenant relationships. Hence, ahabah is neither bound by nor limited to covenant relationships. This is a love instituted simply because the lover has willed it so. This is a love exercised by the lover "for his name's sake". For no other reason than that it was his will, Yahweh exercised ahabah love toward Israel when he chose Israel to

¹N. H. Snaith, Some Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament, p. 94 ff.

be his holy people. If one looks to the stem word ahab, the definition becomes a bit clearer. Ahab is an extremely common noun and can be used for any and every type of love. It is frequently found to describe a sort of condescending love exercised by a superior toward an inferior. Conversely, it appears as the dutiful love of servant toward master. Thus ahab constitutes initiating love on the part of God toward Israel and likewise the dutiful love of Israel toward God and the covenant established by him through the exercise of this phenomenon. Ahab and ahabah can be cited also by a different title--election.² The exercise of the sort of love described by these words causes a special situation to ensue. To the Hebrew this sort of love describes an internal feeling of yearning or longing which dictates further action to take place. Though the cause behind election love is not always easily discernible, especially in the case of Israel and Yahweh, yet there is evidently some reason for the attraction felt. The Psalmist cites God as performing certain tasks and functions "for his name's sake". Perhaps this love is performed by Yahweh only "for his name's sake" so far as human reason can discern. The ahabah of Yahweh is frequently regarded as irrational love. Insofar as no human

²G. Ernest Wright, The Old Testament Against Its Environment, pp. 54 ff.

reason can suffice as an explanation for this love, it is to be regarded as irrational. The point, however, is not that the reason for ahabah love must be made perceptible, rather it is the very nature of this love that its cause remain imperceptible. It remains with the one instituting this sort of love--the lover--to know the reason for it and to exercise it as he sees fit. This is the first point of the means by which the covenant in Israel was instituted. Yahweh did not have to love Israel. In fact, to the human mind there were many more reasons which indicated that he should not. Covenant instituting love which God exercised toward Israel resulted simply because God chose to exercise it. In this lies the linguistic understanding of the love resulting in Israel's chosenness or election.

Having begun to love Israel in the fashion implied by ahabah, the logical conclusion to this instituting love is a means of continuance which not only maintains but ever renews the strength of the ahabah exercised. Hebrew employs the term chesed to describe the maintaining love so necessary to the covenant. It is necessary, having established a love, to find the means to express its continuation. This is precisely the flavor and intent of the word chesed. In the covenantal relationship choice is the first matter, dutiful faithfulness the second. Both of these are inspired by ahabah, but it is chesed that perpetuates, indeed, actuates

ahabah. If one were to choose one or the other of these two terms as more nearly describing the realization of the covenantal relationship, it would be nearly an impossible, indeed, a senseless choice. Chesed describes God's eagerness, earnestness, steadfastness, lovingkindness, concern and mercy shown to Israel. But God exhibits his chesed toward Israel only because he has already demonstrated his commitment to Israel through the exercise of ahabah. Having "gone out on a limb", as it were, in choosing Israel, he now, as part of choosing to love, chooses also to sustain Israel through his continuing love. Thus far it would seem that the chief responsibility for establishing and maintaining the covenantal relationship rests with God. Indeed, the power for such establishment and maintenance are his. There is, however, a demand placed on the godly and serious Israelite to uphold his rightful function in the situation. Chesed depends upon the loyalty of both men and God to the conditions established by God's willful loving of Israel. As a result of what God willed, who he is and what he has done³ the conditions are set as to what course of action both God and Israel will pursue. This is reminiscent of Hittite suzerainty treaties, as Dr. Guthrie points out,⁴ and

³Harvey H. Guthrie, God and History in the Old Testament, pp. 41 ff.

⁴Ibid. pp. 42-3.

speaks for the determined nature of the covenant about which Israel has little or nothing to say except in what is rightfully a thankful ratification or sanction, though these are perhaps too strong words to describe Israel's situation. To cite an example used to define ahabah, the use of the phrase "for his name's sake" can as well be applied to chesed as to ahabah. Inasmuch as Yahweh's instituting love was a showing forth of his power and of his nature and because he chose Israel for no more reason than desire, God is being true to his name, causing to be what he will cause to be. So far as God's work for his name's sake is concerned in connection with chesed, the main point here is that as steadfastness is one of the characteristics of Yahweh it would be a violation of his nature not to continue a situation which he had caused himself by willing it. Thus it would appear that once the covenant with Yahweh was established, it was established for good. Indeed, this is the intent of chesed. Although ahabah may suggest some of the finality of God's decision in the election of Israel, the real permanence of the covenant is most clearly defined by chesed. Because of God's love which he exercises faithfully in maintaining what he has established, it is impossible ever to have the covenant broken totally and irreparably. Though human loyalty to the covenant may ebb,

God's loyalty to his established situation is maintained through his ahabah further enacted in his chesed.

Within this framework of the linguistic meanings of the words most often used to describe covenant love, one can see a real paradox of need for and superfluity of the established situation. So far as Israel is concerned there is no paradox. Israel needs Yahweh's love in order to prosper, if not to allow her to continue to be Israel. For Israel the covenant was the sign that Yahweh's favor would be steadfastly bestowed regardless of how unworthy Israel seemed from the very beginning, or how very unworthy she proved to be eventually. The superfluity of the chosenness of Israel is shown (Deuteronomy 7:6-8) as resulting from Yahweh's ahabah exercised in Israel's favor. It is not because of anything that Israel is or has done that God has chosen her. Rather it is because God chose to love Israel that the covenantal relationship exists. Yahweh existed before he chose Israel. Hence Israel has little to offer him in his existence. God didn't need Israel and the covenant to make him who he is. This he has always been. In this light, Israel's election appears to be superfluous. Yet the implication of ahabah and chesed indicates that Yahweh has need of Israel to be his holy people, to be his high priestly nation, to be his witness among the nations. Hence, Israel has a function to perform in the covenantal

relationship. In the paradox Yahweh needs Israel "for his name's sake" yet he does not need Israel to make him who he is. This indicates the willful giving of God's love evident from the implications of ahabah and chesed. It is this determined choice of Israel on the part of God and in turn Israel's bounden duty to be faithful to God's outpouring of love to her which characterizes the two-way relationship of the covenant. Though the primary action comes from God, the participation of Israel is demanded in return. God has established this covenant: first for his name's sake; and second for Israel's sake. Israel can do nothing but respond in suitable fashion by remaining steadfast to the covenantal agreement.

II. CONCERNING THE DEVELOPMENT OF COVENANTAL THEOLOGY

While it is impossible to trace the concept of covenant to its earliest possible source, it is possible to discover the various understandings of it and the role that it has played in the life of Israel. Though it is quite correct to speak of the several covenants which have existed in the history of Israel in order to denote the changes and additions which have taken place in the relationship and the progress of the relationship, yet the covenant is not many but one. When the various covenants are discussed,

there is by no means any intent of speaking of a new ahabah; for through the chesed of Yahweh is the covenant ever and again renewed. The concept of covenant has not been altered in speaking of the various covenants. What has been altered are the conditions and terms of the covenant. Thus it is not necessary to differentiate between the covenants and the covenantal relationship herein discussed since the relationship itself and not its terms is the matter at hand. Yahweh is ever beginning anew to love (chesed) Israel and to establish his covenant among the people. The point remains that the concept of covenant is fixed in the life of Israel while its practice and terms change to meet the ever-renewed and ever-deepened relationship of God with his people.

The earliest strands of covenantal theology in Israel's history which find their culmination in the Deuteronomic tradition can be traced more or less directly to the prophetic movements in the Northern Kingdom during the eighth century. Rather than attempting to isolate covenantal theology according to men or particular movements, it is more correct to assume that the theological development was the result of the Northern tribal amphictyony which gave this legacy to the prophetic figures of the eighth century.⁵ In short, it was the shifting political and

⁵Ibid.

economic circumstances which lent encouragement to such a theology and not any personal conjectures on the part of the prophets themselves. This is not to be taken to mean that the individual prophets had nothing to do with framing the thought presented as the covenant of Yahweh with Israel. Indeed, the personal involvement of a Hosea or a Jeremiah can hardly be overlooked. The formal endorsement of the concept by Hosea, its subsequent adoption by Jeremiah along with the re-evaluation and re-interpretation by various others along the path, led even more toward the culmination of covenantal theology in Deuteronomy.⁶ Thus it can rightly be said that the theology which underlies the whole of the covenantal concept is based as much on the prophetic message as anything else. The culmination of the covenant theology in the book of Deuteronomy depends not only upon the past message of the prophets but upon the political circumstances which precipitated their utterances. That this concept found its way into the Deuteronomic tradition is not surprising as the present form of Deuteronomy was the result of the need for preserving a unifying statement of the things all Israel lived by.⁷

⁶F. W. Dillistone, The Structure of the Divine Society, pp. 31-46.

⁷Guthrie, op. cit., pp. 93-4.

The very nature of the covenant would indicate that it ought to be viewed as more than a mere gentleman's agreement. Because the relationship was initiated by the decisive action of God in loving Israel and because of Israel's passive role at least so far as the exercise of ahabah is concerned, one must question where Israel's activity begins and ends in the relationship. In short, the question amounts to what place law has in covenant. This question is of utmost importance in this study because of the synoptic picture of the relation of Jesus to the law and hence to the covenant.

Law and covenant are necessarily inseparable concepts in Israel's life. Since the covenant is no agreement between equals, but rather a pact between a conquered people and their conqueror, some sort of ground rules must of necessity be laid. It is most assuredly a mistake to picture the covenant as an institution founded by love serving as the guarantor of mutual obligations. It is this also, but this over-simplifies the constraint laid upon Israel to keep the provisions of the covenant.⁸ Without some idea of the seriousness of the obligation laid upon Israel the entire concept of covenant deteriorates. The law must exist within the covenantal relationship as the means by which the terms

⁸Ibid., p. 42.

of the covenant are met. Israel's election resulting from Yahweh's exercise of ahabah and chesed is not just a privileged position to be cherished by the populace. It is, as Professor Snaith says, a condition of unconditional love which demands faithfulness of both parties involved.⁹ Yahweh will remain faithful as this is a part of his revealed nature. The law exists as the means by which Yahweh can discover the righteousness which he demands in Israel. Thus although Israel will undoubtedly become unfaithful, the law serves as the means to recapture Israel's wandering passions. As chesed is Yahweh's means of ever and again beginning to love Israel, the keeping of the law is ever and again the means by which Israel begins anew in her relationship with her Supreme Lord. In all this God's act of loving is not so much an imposition as it is a free gift which Israel could hardly refuse. Israel was called upon to respond from the very onset of the relationship. The covenant was an imposition from the standpoint that Israel was not the actor nor could the bestowal very well be refused. On the other hand since an imposition implies that a hardship is worked upon the recipient, the covenant can hardly be called an imposition. Nor ought one to suppose that Israel was unwilling to receive such an election. There exist many contradictory analyses of the constraint placed

⁹Snaith, op. cit.

upon Israel by the covenant.¹⁰ I feel that the best evidence lies with that side of the discussion which emphasizes Israel's bound condition. The demands are very real since refusal of Yahweh's love brings his wrath. Hence Israel was not by any means free to choose whether or not she would have Yahweh for her God. The declaration is "I am your God and you are my people".

The prophetic message lies at the heart of the development of a covenantal theology. Though the importance of the several covenants can hardly be summarily dismissed, these are a side issue in this study. To put it more succinctly, the concern of Jesus with the law and hence with the covenant lies in the interpretation or misinterpretation of the concept of covenant on the part of Jewish popular piety in his lifetime. Since so many of Jesus' teachings are directed against the scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, et al., the concern of this study is to attempt to determine what he found amiss in the understandings achieved by pious Judaism of his day. Since this is a topic dependent upon the development of covenantal theology and not the several covenants themselves, it is a matter of necessity that these side issues be avoided.

¹⁰Cf. Wright, op. cit., p. 58 and Guthrie, op. cit. p. 42.

Perhaps one of the best known and most fruitful examples of the developing theology of covenant extant is the prophecy of Hosea. The recorded utterances of Hosea abound in references to God's love for Israel being like that of husband for wife. Likewise Hosea compares Israel's unfaithfulness to the covenant with the unfaithful wife who prostitutes herself for other lovers who seem more appealing at the moment than the husband. Hosea contains a real note of hopefulness when he speaks of the husband retrieving the wife, holding up her lovers and showing them for what they really are and finally restoring her to the position of a worthy marriage partner. This prophecy deals admirably with the demand for Israel to remain steadfast in the covenant as the faithful wife. Such a union between God and Israel, stemming from Yahweh's outgoing lovingkindness toward Israel, implies a responsibility to remain faithful to the task at hand. As Professor Vriezen quotes H. H. Rowley saying; "The idea of being loved may, indeed, be connected with it (responsibility because of election), but the emphasis really rests on the call, the task."¹¹ Thus it becomes even clearer that the purpose of Israel's existence cannot be understood except through the covenant with Yahweh; for without this covenant Israel has no reason to

¹¹Th. C. Vriezen, An Outline of Old Testament Theology, p. 167.

be. Hence the emphasis rests upon Israel's task of being faithful to the covenant, to being, as Hosea prophesies, the faithful wife of Yahweh. Like Amos, Hosea's contemporary who directed his prophecy against the Northern Kingdom, Hosea states the theology of covenant in negative terms. Both speak more clearly for the wrath of God which will ensue should Israel continue in her unfaithfulness than for any positive definition of what Israel's rightful covenant position amounts to. Israel's doom is prophesied because of her unfaithfulness. Because of Israel's call to witness to Yahweh, Israel will witness even if the means of witness must be forced by the judgment of God upon the nation.

The Old Testament knows of God's love, mercy and grace. Evidence points to the fact that God has bestowed these arbitrarily upon Israel. God has chosen to love Israel not because she is greater than any other nation, rather this is the case simply because he has willed it. This appears to be an arbitrary judgment typical of the Hebrew thought on love meaning what is preferable as over against hate which is what is less preferable. Likewise God's love and wrath are dispensed to Israel arbitrarily. Israel is loved not because she is the best to be found. Israel experiences God's wrath not because she is totally depraved. Love is initiated by God's will; his wrath is meted out because Israel has failed to meet the demands of

the covenant as fully as she is capable.¹² The purpose of the covenant, as shown by the prophecy of Hosea, permits also the return of Israel to a state of righteousness, as well as making the demands outlined by the law. The permanence of the bond is witnessed by Hosea in his utterance on the return of the wife to her righteous state. It is this permanence which gives rise to the immediacy of reform in Israel. By the possibility for reform is Israel capable of remaining the elect of God even after wandering from the demands of the covenant. By the nature of the covenant is this return possible. Because the covenant finds a part of its validity in the chesed of Yahweh and because Israel possesses a knowledge of the law is it ever possible for Israel and Yahweh to begin again the covenantal relationship.

The prophecy of Jeremiah and the present form of the book of Deuteronomy are dependent upon a common tradition. The tradition has its roots in the history of the Northern Kingdom. It is for this reason that the high development of covenantal theology is to be seen in Jeremiah and in Deuteronomy. Perhaps the best selection of Jeremiah's prophecy on the nature of the covenant is to be discovered in 2:4-13 which is stated as a covenant lawsuit in which the grievances of Yahweh against Israel are listed in such a way as to define the nature and terms of the covenant. For

¹²Ibid., p. 167.

Jeremiah, as Hosea, the covenant is absolutely binding upon Israel. It is Israel's unfaithfulness which will result in the ultimate doom. In 20:7-18 Jeremiah speaks of his own role in the situation. Because of his steadfastness in adhering to the conditions of the covenant, Jeremiah and likewise all the faithful will be vindicated in the end. In this lies the note of hope for healing the rift resultant from Israel's unfaithfulness. Once again the permanence of the bond is emphasized. Hosea's earlier prophecy, as well as Amos', against Israel as a result of unfaithfulness to the covenant had become such a permanent addition to the theology of covenant that we find virtually little difference in the nature of the accusations of Jeremiah levelled at Judah (c. 626-587), except in specifics. The generality which results and is transmitted onward to the book of Deuteronomy is that unless the covenant is kept by Israel Yahweh will take the necessary steps to return Israel to her state of righteous participation in the relationship.

The necessity of keeping the law is exemplified by the teachings of the book of Deuteronomy as well as by the codification of the laws contained in it. Deuteronomy came into being, as I have mentioned earlier, as an attempt to codify and isolate the various things by which Israel lives. It is a necessary document of its period as a means of unifying a people freshly returned from exile. Furthermore,

Deuteronomy finds as a part of its cause the prevention of such an exile in the future. Hence in its theological stance the book of Deuteronomy is the product of the Northern Kingdom tragedy of the eighth century as applied to the sixth century conquest of Judah and reinterpreted in the light of post-exile urgencies. The ground work of the theology was laid by the prophetic message. Because of this the covenant is the central issue and most urgent matter concerning Israel's well-being. Prophecy has always dealt with immediate issues or with issues as they begin to demonstrate their immediacy. The covenant is treated as one of these immediate concerns partly as a result of its theologically prophetic beginnings and partly as an actual testimony to the exacting demands of Yahweh upon Israel. It is with this sense of immediacy that the concept of covenant was introduced in Israel and continues as the central issue of Judaism.

The prophecy which gave rise to the development of covenantal theology resulted from the changing political scene in Palestine. It has often been said that the political vacuum which existed from about 1500-1000 B.C. in this Near-Eastern area accounts for the numerous petty monarchies. Israel achieved its independence as a result of this period. The Davidic kingdom was established in the wake of the political chaos. No political power was able to dominate

the entire fertile crescent until the rise of Assyria beginning about 750 B.C. This interim period is often regarded as the Golden Age of Israel. It is this period of prosperity in Israel which sees the beginnings of the covenantal concept. The test of the covenant and the deepening concern with its implications come in the waning years of Israel after the North-South schism. Only in these political surroundings can the prophetic message of covenantal responsibility find a climate in which to develop. The implications had always existed, but it was the urgency of the changing situation which prompted a deeper and more concerned look at the demands made by Yahweh upon his people.

Since the nation had experienced Yahweh's wrath through her fall from covenantal obedience, it is not at all strange that the Deuteronomic Code took the form that it did as a sort of preventive measure to insure Israel's future well-being. Likewise, it is hardly surprising that the Pharisaic party, in particular, took the attitude which it did toward some of the teachings of Jesus which reinterpreted the meaning of the law and in some instances questioned the existence of specific laws. A prime example of this is the discussion of whether the Sabbath exists for man or man for the Sabbath.¹³ The "chicken or egg" problem

¹³Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-15.

which ensues results from the urgency of fulfilling the central demand of the covenant, to witness while grappling with the fulfillment of the law as the condition which allows Israel to witness effectively.

CHAPTER III

COVENANT IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

I. COVENANT AND POPULAR PIETY

It is significant to note that those who are named as the provocators of the death of Jesus are not specifically called Pharisees by the Synoptic Gospels. Though the Pharisees are often reported to have examined Jesus in order to "expose" him, they are never mentioned in the Passion narrative in the Synoptics.¹ One should not assume on the basis of this fact, however, that some of the group responsible for the agitation resulting in the cry "crucify him" were not Pharisees. Since the blame is placed on the chief priests and elders, (Mark alone adds scribes to this list and rulers of the temple are included only by Luke) the Pharisees per se do not appear at the point at which they might most be expected. Perhaps the intent of the Synoptic authors is not so much to exonerate the Pharisees as it is to lay the blame on a brand of popular piety which pervaded all of "official" Judaism in this era. With the exception of Mark who cites the scribes there is no reference to parties in connection with the trial and crucifixion. This suggests that the accusing group possessed a

¹Donald W. Riddle, Jesus and the Pharisees, p. 6.

certain heterogeneity which defies our desire to label it according to the beliefs of its members. This is adequate testimony to the fact that the Sanhedrin, for all its diversities in membership, was capable of acting as a body when the threat was sufficiently great. Rather than attempting to define according to party beliefs or traditions those who were responsible for Jesus' death, it is essential that we disregard the traditional popular condemnation of the Pharisees and look for a new device to identify Jesus' accusers and the reasons behind their attitude.

A truer division of Judaism which represents all factions rather than a number of parties² is the division which accounts for those Jews whom we would regard as "hard-core" or "fringe members" in our modern terminology. In more traditional nomenclature these are known as chasidim and am-ha-aretz. A clue to their positions exists in their names. The Chasidim derive their name from chesed and would be known, hence, as the "faithful ones" or more literally as the "continuants" or "adherents". These are largely members of one of the parties given to strictest observance of the laws. These people were primarily the wealthier members of

²The six distinct sects within Judaism in the time of Jesus are Zealots, Sadducees, Scribes, Pharisees, Essenes, Nazarites according to Dr. George Sandison, King James Version Appendix, World Publishing Company, p. 31, though most scholars would be hesitant to list the scribes as a distinct sect.

Palestinian society as they were the only ones who could afford to take the time from employment to maintain the strenuous observances. The am-ha-aretz or the common people of God are somewhat akin to the Latin concept of plebs sancta Dei. We might call these people the fringe members of Jewish society. They are in this position because of their financial status primarily. They are the people who cannot afford to lose the working hours they would have to give up were they to be numbered among the chasidim. Likewise those members of Palestinian society who lived a sufficiently remote distance from the temple or from a synagogue were excluded almost automatically by their inability to attend frequently, not to mention the great difficulty of maintaining ritual cleanness while travelling any distance. These classifications say nothing about what each group believed, for a member of the am-ha-aretz could well be a fervent believer though unable to practice his belief. Therefore those who agitated against Jesus had to choose between two courses of action: (a) arouse support of the common people by appealing to their beliefs and not to their position as a separate "class"; (b) maintain a secrecy about the proceedings and depend upon the friends of Barabbas to appeal in his behalf. In the time of Jesus there was no such phenomenon as a "cultural Jew" to be discerned. Certainly the am-ha-aretz would not claim this

position. The significant separations within Judaism were not theological nor were they what might be called liturgical differences though these are the obvious implications. The separation resulted from social strata dependent upon occupation and parentage largely. Hence it is of utmost importance to note the basic unity of Judaism despite what many attempt to cite as the disintegration of Jewish society resulting from the existence of religious parties.

For this reason Jesus appealed to all classes in his teaching. Jesus realized well that the faith of Judaism ran deeper than the effects of class structure. Thus one ought not to be surprised when confronted with the account of Jesus and the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17-22) any more than with Jesus' healing a leper by touching him, an act which rendered Jesus ritually unclean lest he took the proper steps to correct the situation.³ Jesus was aware of the necessity of making his appeal to all Israel. He recognized the fact that the concept of God with which most Jews were familiar knew no class nor party boundaries. The contention which did exist was that of social strata not of theological position. For this reason we cannot be too surprised that the Pharisees complained against Jesus "he receives sinners

³Paula Mirtow, Jesus and the Religion of the Old Testament, p. 32.

and eats with them".⁴ These and a wealth of other examples all point to the general high regard for the law existing in the life of Israel in the time of Jesus. Even among the am-ha-aretz there is a very real regard for the law though because of social position they were able only to give nodding obedience to it. Jesus understands this mission to be that of recovering the "lost sheep of the house of Israel".⁵ Presumably this refers to those who have strayed from the fold of the chosen people--those who have failed to realize their position as members of the covenanted community--those who have failed to live up to that covenant because of their personal feelings, their social position or their lack of understanding the meaning of the covenant. The "lost sheep" can equally well be applied to all Israel even in Pharasaic terms and thought since all Israel is capable of being "lost" through her capability to trespass the law. Hence it is easily demonstrable that Jesus' teachings are directed to a restored understanding of the prophetic message of the covenantal relationship in the life of Israel.

The traditional view which portrays John the Baptist as the last of the prophets of Israel is worth noting in this

⁴Luke 15:2; Matthew 9:11; Mark 2:16; Luke 5:30.

⁵Matthew 10:6; Matthew 15:24.

context. If we ponder what became of the prophetic concept of covenant in post-exilic times down through the inter-testamental period, jumping from Nehemiah to John the Baptist, we are confronted with a profound change in point of emphasis. Before the conquests, both in the North and in the South, prophetic messages dealt almost entirely with the impending doom resulting from the disregard for the keeping of the covenant and abounded in exhortations for return to faithfulness. However, from the time of Nehemiah until the end of prophetism exemplified in John the Baptist, the message is primarily one of repentance.

In a sense this is an admission that humanity is unable to keep the law absolutely. Accompanying this message, however, was the exhortation to keep the law which stood as a reminder to Israel of the past glories which she had lost when she had fallen from the covenant and hence from Yahweh's favor. In some sense the keeping of the law might be regarded as "preventive medicine". By this means Israel sought to remain righteous in God's eyes and to avoid any further punishment like that endured under the Babylonians. Manipulation of the law by rigorous obedience when possible and by repentance for short-comings when violated denotes a very real change in the concept of the nature of God. Seemingly Israel has forgotten the very nature of ahabah,

that in being chosen her merit was not even considered. Only Yahweh's estimate of Israel is of any importance. It is this which Israel has seemingly forgotten. In the public confession of sin in Nehemiah 9 the emphasis is upon Israel's unworthiness, yet the purpose of the confession seems as much a way for Israel to propitiate Yahweh as it does a public repentance. The vow is to keep the law, to live righteously, so that Yahweh will never again need to purge his chosen people of their sin. The vow is sincere. What is amiss is the understanding of the nature of God. Yahweh has not changed. Israel has misunderstood her role as God's witness. In fact she has ceased to function in this capacity. For this there is no means of repentance. The correction comes from Yahweh who returns Israel to her function. Hence John the Baptist's preaching of baptism for the repentance of sins represents a further acknowledgment that Israel has not changed her ways despite her promises of the past four centuries. Matthew intimates that even the Pharisees and the Sadducees, the staunchest supporters of the law, knew that something was amiss in Israel's devotion and obedience to God. Matthew 3:7 relates their coming to John for baptism and his consequent denunciation of them as perverters of the covenant. John's denunciation indicates the extent to which Israel has fallen

from her task of witness. Israel was chosen for a particular purpose: to be the holy people of Yahweh, his priestly nation, the witness to the world of Yahweh's supremacy. Rather than witnessing to Yahweh for "his name's sake" she has focused her attention on the promises of the covenant without paying any heed to its stipulations except to comply with the ceremonial laws and outward prescriptions. Jesus, speaking of the witnessing community as represented by the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23:15 describes their witness as being to Yahweh's promises and not to his Lordship over all life. It is the correction of this situation which John the Baptist urges in preaching baptism for the repentance of sins. Herein lies John's acknowledgment of the purpose of Jesus' ministry.

The separation of Israel into chasidim and am-ha-aretz was the kind of separation characteristic of that which has always divided groups of different social positions in every society. Members of religious parties were primarily members of the upper levels of society who had the time to devote to their religious practices and would not suffer by spending so much time in worship and other activities. These were but a small fragment of the total of society. If the teachings of Jesus were offensive, they were so in the eyes of more than the members of a single religious party or else they would not have received so much attention from the

Sanhedrin. For this reason it is a fairly reasonable assumption that those offended were from many quarters of official Judaism. Had Jesus offended only those of a single religious party the consequences might have been different. These would have represented a minority. It seems unlikely that his teachings upset only these people, for if this were the case the evangelists would have undoubtedly delighted in reporting this in the passion narratives. Instead they report the entire religious hierarchy as being instigators of the complaint. While one may deduce that there was no tangible expression of corporate public piety in "normal" times, yet the faith of Israel was so deeply ingrained in the people that it could be stirred to the surface readily when it seemed necessary to defend the tenets of that faith from possible perversion; such reasoning disregards the actual Synoptic testimony to the secrecy maintained by the Sanhedrin members who were, for once, acting as a unit. Therefore, while we can to some extent define the differences between devout Judaism and passive Judaism, we can in no way assume that the faith of Israel is held by only a few pious souls associated with a single party.

As I have said earlier, there is no such thing as a "cultural Jew" in the time of Jesus except by way of referring

to all those who are members of the culture described by the name Israel. Likewise there is no such thing as "Jewish-ness" except as it describes those who are related to Yahweh by a covenant which also binds them to each other as a community. For any Jew, am-ha-aretz or chasidim, life outside the covenant is an impossible idea. Hence, in his teaching and ministry Jesus had no choice but to deal with all of Israel since all of Israel was unified by the principle of community responsibility for witness. Since Jesus taught extensively about the relation of people to God and their moral responsibilities to each other, he taught extensively about the nature of covenant. In this way he invited the criticism and condemnation of official Judaism when he touched on aspects of the covenantal relationship which differed from the traditional view or at least from that being taught in his day, while perhaps stirring both the good will and the questionings of the common people. That which challenges the framework of a given society, the very ground on which it rests, has never in the history of humanity been allowed to remain a side issue for very long. As the prophets were treated with contempt for attempting to turn Israel from what she believed to be the true tradition of the covenant to what was actually the purest practice of covenantal relationship, so also Jesus found himself subject to similar scrutiny for attempting to

express what he thought to be the truest life of Israel. Because of the nature of Israel's unity under the covenant, the teachings of Jesus held implications for both the faith and the national structure of Israel.

II. JESUS AND THE COVENANT

Since Jesus was a Jew he was inside the covenant community by birth. If the genealogical listings in Matthew 1:1-17 and Luke 3:23-38 prove anything conclusively it is the purely Jewish nature of Jesus' descent. Rather than pursuing the arguments generally expounded by those who study these genealogies, it appears sufficient, indeed wiser, to note briefly to what general truth the witness of these verses is borne. In trying to sift the genealogies of Matthew and Luke to discover their purpose and intent it is better to look at the names collectively rather than to try to wring the significance out of each. Every name belongs to the "house of Israel". This fact firmly establishes Jesus' relation to the covenant community. It is significant to note that Matthew begins his genealogy with Abraham, the father of the people of Israel. This is an important tie to establish and speaks further of Jesus and his position within the body of the chosen. Luke not only mentions Abraham but carries his tracers back to Adam.

This was important in the time in which Luke wrote and important to the audience which he addressed. His geneology links Jesus with the founder of the covenanted people and with all humanity. This is a critically urgent matter in an era in which membership in the Church was an issue. The relationship to Adam bespeaks Christ's universal mission while at the same time relating Israel and her history exemplified in Abraham and his faith to the rest of creation. The reference in both lists to Davidic descent can be viewed only as an attempt to establish the authenticity of the Messiahship of Jesus. Here again the central concept is the covenant relationship since the Messiah was to come entirely for the benefit of Israel.

So far as the teaching about the covenant to be derived from this is concerned, this is central to understanding the role of Jesus as told by the Synoptists as well as central to understanding the concept of covenant as taught by Jesus and reflected by these evangelists. Jesus was inseparably bound to Yahweh by the covenant. This he shared with all of Israel. Luke points out that he is in line with the whole of human history by his descent from Adam. This he shares with Jew and Gentile alike. In no way could Jesus stand apart from these two traditions into which he was born. A significant implication to be discovered from this and from the story of the healing of

the daughter of Syrophenician woman⁶ is that which reflects Jesus' concept of the universal availability of the love of God exemplified by the covenant in Israel. As the genealogy of Jesus testifies to his call to unite the traditions, so also the prophetic call to Israel to witness to Yahweh's authority and greatness before the nations of the world is repeated in one representative man. Hence from the outset of the Gospels according to Matthew and Luke one is to understand that Jesus is to be viewed not only as an individual who just happened to be a member of the covenanted people but also as the representative and true practitioner of the central demand of the covenant--obedient witness. Hence it can be said that Jesus is Israel in his actions and witness, or is what Israel ought to be. Jesus was most definitely aware of his relationship to the covenant because he was aware of himself as a member of the House of Israel. The duality of tradition was not the duality with which we of the twentieth century are grappling. It is not a matter of religion versus society in the mind of Jesus. The concern is the witness of Israel, according to her purpose, to the whole world. Jesus' ministry was to those within the covenant community first in order to aid them in seeing more clearly their high priestly function to the Gentile world.

⁶Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30.

Only as Jesus exercised his role as a Jew fulfilling the conditions of the covenant did he minister to those outside the covenant community. Hence, as Bundy points out,⁷ despite the fact that Matthew 5:17-20 is neither a literary nor a logical unity, Jesus is reported to be firmly and emphatically standing within the traditions of Judaism. He reaffirms his belief in Yahweh's relation with Israel through the covenant, as well as speaking in favor of the permanence of the law as a means of preparing Israel to witness. Jesus says that the law will continue as the means of remaining within the covenant relationship until "all is accomplished". Presumably this means that the law must be kept until the kingdom is established. Only when God's kingship over all creation is realized will the law be superceded by direct relationship to God. Then Israel will be called upon to witness fully and finally to Yahweh "for his name's sake".

So far the Messianic consciousness is not to be found overtly in the teachings of Jesus on the place of the law in the covenant. The only inference of such an awareness in passages which are reported as actual teachings of Jesus is Matthew 5:17b, "I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." By this statement the evangelist intimates that the time has come when "all is accomplished". Thus

⁷Walter E. Bundy, Jesus and the First Three Gospels, p. 101.

the law is not abolished by Jesus; rather it is superceded. Walter E. Bundy suggests⁸ that Jesus truly affirmed the faith of Israel throughout his entire life, not negating "one iota, not a dot" of the law. Jesus remained a loyal and devout Jew with no thought of inaugurating a new and different religion. His proclamation is that of the covenant with Yahweh, the demands of which have now become immediate rather than through obedience to the law. It is immediate because Jesus has proclaimed his function of fulfilling the law and the prophets. It is immediate by the evangelist's inference that Jesus is aware of his Messianic calling. Nowhere in Mark's unfolding of the "dogma of Jesus' Messiahship"⁹ does the Second Gospel state positively the nature of Jesus' mission. Mark allows the mystery to unfold in such a way that the "dogma" is evident only when the whole story is heard. Luke employs the reported saying about the nullification of the law in reporting Jesus' teaching on divorce. While Matthew 5:18 is paralleled by Luke 16:17, Mark never employs the saying. The obvious comparison which must be made is that which takes into account parallel section 221.

In this section regarding the time of the parousia, which is a part of the Synoptic Apocalypse, the evangelists

⁸Ibid., p. 102.

⁹Ibid., pp. 78ff.

report Jesus saying "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."¹⁰ How best to link this with "till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished" is uncertain. Evidently Jesus does mean that the understanding of the covenant relationship as he practices, teaches and interprets it will supercede the place of the law. Since the only thing which can surpass the covenant relationship maintained through the law is the kingdom itself, Jesus (or the evangelists in their style of reporting) implies that he has brought the kingdom and that his words are the Word of God. Though the law is superceded by the direct relationship with God, the covenant is by no means voided. Indeed Yahweh's covenant is strengthened in the sense that its terms are realized literally. The covenant is manifested fully by the establishment of the kingdom. Jesus, as a Jew, was profoundly influenced by the covenant relationship as were all Jews regardless of socio-religious status. Jesus, as the Christ, caused his followers to have a deeper understanding and regard for the covenant; for the kingdom of God is none other than the realization of the promises of the covenant. It is to this belief that the Synoptic materials cited herein witness.

¹⁰Matthew 24:34-36; Mark 13:30-37; Luke 21:32-36.

III. THE ADVENT OF THE NEW COVENANT

Strictly speaking, there is nothing new about the covenant relationship so far as the Synoptic Gospels are concerned. There is a newly instituted witness to and sign of the authority of God, but the covenant remains unchanged. The terms of the covenant have been transformed, but the basic statement of the prophetic concept of covenant signified by ahabah and chesed translated agape in the Septuagint and the Greek New Testament still refers to the same relationship between God and creation. In the teachings of Jesus on the law, which is what must be dealt with since Jesus is not recorded to have taught anything specific about his personal relation to the covenant by the Synoptics, we must note that he does not abrogate the particular precept to which he speaks in the majority of instances.¹¹ At the same time, one must note, as Beare suggests,¹² that Matthew in his record at 5:17-20 is speaking to a particular situation and a certain group of people. In the controversy between Judaism and primitive Christianity there was a natural tendency to minimize the differences between the teaching of Jesus and the understanding of the law which was

¹¹Bundy, op. cit., p. 101.

¹²Frank W. Beare, The Earliest Records of Jesus, pp. 57 ff.

currently embraced by Judaism. Even Paul finds it necessary to be something of an apologist in regard to the place of the law in Christianity. Paul denies that Christians would destroy the law (Romans 3:31). The fulfillment of the law through the coming of Christ, who renders the existence of the law superfluous, is a particularly Pauline concept. The teachings of Paul which reflect this understanding are perhaps the best commentary on the actual impact of Jesus' teachings on the law. One must certainly note that the Pauline interpretation of the effect of Jesus' teachings on the law is more wide spread by Synoptic times than is the Jewish-Christian interpretation. This may witness to the effectiveness of Paul's missionary endeavors rather than to the actual public evaluation of Jesus' mission and its relation to the law. Perhaps the concept of the continuity of the covenant relationship regardless of the effect of Jesus upon the law is a Synoptic attempt to placate the Judaizing party in their hour of defeat. Yet the total implication as seen from Jesus' own loyalty to the authority of the tradition of Israel would indicate that this is not necessarily the entire cause behind the Synoptic endorsement of the continuing covenant. It is doubtful that the Synoptic writers would bow so completely to the opinions of the parties in the early Church as to play one against the

other, sparing the prejudices of each, in attempting to chronicle the life and teachings of Jesus.

While it is evident that the Judaizing party was partially responsible for keeping alive the memory of Jesus' faithfulness to the covenant relationship and the law which supported it, it is equally evident that Jesus did not abrogate the law. Though some of Jesus' teachings on the law may seem radical, it must be remembered that Jesus cited the law as a springboard for his teachings about the true nature of the covenant relationship. Hence, if any particular teaching of Jesus tends to contradict a specific law, it is not a reflection upon Jesus' regard or disregard for the principle of law but his opinion of that particular statute or the attitude which accompanies it. Quite often Jesus taught more explicitly about the attitudes involved than about the laws themselves. In Matthew 5:20-22 there appears a good example of this. Jesus teaches that the commandment against murder goes deeper than actual murder, even to a murder committed through attitude toward another. It might appear that Jesus supported a super-Pharisaism on the basis of teachings of this sort. Yet in citing parallel section 69¹³ one might conclude that Jesus was an antinomian. Thus it becomes even clearer that Jesus sought a correction of

¹³Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5.

attitude and not an alteration in the specific laws mentioned. He maintained that attitudes such as these cited above while they are not explicitly a part of the written law, yet they are a part of the concern of Yahweh for his people implicit in the covenant relationship.

Jesus appealed to the popular piety of the covenant community to be a pure covenantal piety. The law exists for the sake of preserving Israel's faithfulness to Yahweh. Law and obedience to the law are not the proper response to Yahweh's chesed. The proper response to chesed resulting from Yahweh's ahabah can only be witness. Law and obedience to the law are merely the method of maintaining an atmosphere in which the witness can occur. Thus Jesus teaches that Israel ought to be more concerned with her actual purpose than with the method of readying herself for her purpose. In so many words, Jesus implies that the time is ripe for Israel to witness, if she is going to, and that she should do so. Returning to Matthew 5:17b it is possible that the fulfillment of the law and the prophets is Jesus' way of saying that the time is accomplished when all that remains for the final establishment of the kingdom is Israel's proclamation of Yahweh to the world. Hence it is probable that if Jesus is aware of his Messiahship in this passage, he expects the kingdom to come momentarily and his Christly reign to commence simultaneously. This appears to depend

upon Israel's fulfilling her covenantal role of witness. Jesus institutes no "new" covenant in this. Rather he urges Israel to accomplish her function under the covenant. Jesus provides in himself the new means of access to the covenantal relationship. Israel has but to accomplish her purpose; for the law and the prophets are to be fulfilled in Jesus. God has willed Israel to witness, to testify, not just to prepare to do so.

While some of Jesus' more radical teachings on the law may have offended certain Jews, especially since disregard for any one law was equivalent to breaking the whole of the law, the more likely cause of complaint against his teachings are disclosures of his mission. Again Matthew 5:17b-18 serves well as an example of what is meant. Though Jesus does not say "I am the fulfillment of the law and the prophets", he does claim that his purpose is to fulfill them. It is impossible to say conclusively that this is a proclamation of Messiahship. Beare suggests that this is merely a reply to opponents who accuse Jesus of antinomian tendencies.¹⁴ At the same time, the apologetic nature of the statements which follow and of Matthew 5:17b per se suggests that more is at stake than religious ideology. Matthew 5:17b, unlike the following verses, is an attempt to

¹⁴Beare, op. cit.

reconcile a seeming persona non grata with a rejecting audience. The following verses are justifications of teachings. If 5:17b is a justification of Jesus as a person and of his ministry, it perhaps ought to be taken as a Messianic proclamation. Thus, if this is an authentic saying of Jesus, the Synoptic writers apparently employ it here to emphasize the impact of Jesus' ministry upon the law and hence upon the covenantal concept underlying the popular piety of Judaism.

Obviously the teachings of Jesus regarding the law had a profound effect upon popular piety in his time. Though the immediate effect of these upon the interpretation of the law cannot be ascertained from the Synoptic Gospels, it is certain that his teachings did produce sufficient unrest to precipitate the writing of certain rabbis attempting to comment upon his statements.¹⁵ This fact plus the apologetic nature of the Synoptic Gospels in certain instances, notably the Gospel according to St. Luke, testifies to the revolutionary nature of Jesus' teachings. Despite these challenges to the law as it was interpreted in his day, Jesus in no way intended to depart from the traditions of Israel. Indeed Jesus' life and ministry were precisely for Israel's sake. In pointing out the continuing aspects of the

¹⁵e.g. C. G. Montefiore, Rabbinic Literature and Gospel Teachings, pp. 37 ff.

covenant relationship Synoptic writers have preserved for Christianity the very core of Jewish teaching and faith. Jesus taught a right understanding of the purpose of the law, a preparation for fulfilling the demands of the covenant through witness. In this the Synoptics represent Jesus' teachings and ministry as being directed not merely to the "faithful remnant" but to all Israel that she might fulfill her task under the covenant. Jesus did not attempt to introduce the freedom to tamper with the law which allowed a "cheap" interpretation of it. He required a respect for the law commensurate with the purpose which the law served in Israel's life under the covenant.

Jesus did not look outside of Israel for support for his teachings. His purpose was to awaken Israel to her responsibility to the covenant relationship. The chief priests and elders of the people, and all who accused him, did not object to this aspect of his teaching, as is commonly supposed by many Christians. Their objection lay in his personal relationship to the covenant. The moral teachings of Jesus, often cited by a certain pietistic portion of the Church today as the foundation of the Christian faith, do not embody the cause behind the Crucifixion. The rejection of Israel and the crucifixion of Jesus result from the personal involvement with the Christ of God. Segments of the modern church are deluded if they seek only a right

understanding of Jesus' teachings. So also would we be deluded if we presumed that the only complaint of Israel against Jesus arose from his teachings on the law. The "Synoptic Mystery" is the unfolding story of how the Church came to recognize Jesus as the Christ. Such a recognition depends upon personal encounter such as that described by the Synoptics. The complaint against Jesus was not that his teachings seemed to embody a new law code, nor that they seriously challenge a portion of the old one, but rather that the manner of his teachings and the authority with which he presented them, indeed his call to minister to Israel, arose from the fact of his Messiahship. The rejection of Jesus' Messianic claim led to the Crucifixion, not any specific teaching on the law or the covenant relationship though both the law and the covenant behind the law are intimately associated with the Messiah. There is nothing new about the covenant after Jesus; there is no "New Israel". What is new is the means of access to the covenantal relationship, to being a part of Israel. This results from the function of the Christ of God. Thus it is Jesus' person which has meaning for the covenant and not his teachings.

CHAPTER IV

COVENANT IN THE CHURCH

I. "ABBA, FATHER"

The prophetic understanding of the covenant relationship instituted and perpetuated by Yahweh as characterized by the words ahabah and chesed was maintained in Israel through the law. The role of Israel in this relationship was one of witnessing to the promise and love of Yahweh among the nations. Israel's role was to be that of the high priestly nation among nations. For this purpose Israel was chosen, and for this purpose the law was instituted as the means by which Israel kept herself in a suitable condition to bear witness. Indeed through the keeping of the law Israel witnessed to Yahweh's authority demonstrating her complete submission to God even in this way. Because of the anti-monarchial feeling among the leaders and people of the Northern tribal amphictyony which led to the attitude of "no king but Yahweh"¹, the law had a special importance. This attitude never completely died in the North. Hence the law bore a special significance for the covenant understanding which also arose in the traditions of the North.

¹Note the words ascribed to Yahweh in reference to this subject, I Samuel 8:1-9 which reflect the authorship of one from the anti-monarchial group of the period.

Covenantal disobedience is a necessary part of the story also. Despite the warnings of Amos, Israel would not mend her ways. Indeed, Genesis 3:1-24 seems to reflect the same sort of disobedience which Amos condemns in his time. In surveying the examples of covenantal disobedience in the Synoptics perhaps the most striking is the list of "woes" which Jesus directs against pious Judaism in his day.² This is the most comprehensive list of the failures of Israel to maintain the covenant to be found in the Synoptics. Covenantal disobedience seems to be companion to the faithfulness from the days of its institution. To this the J writer testifies in his Genesis story of the fall. To this situation Amos speaks Yahweh's words of doom. To this Jesus pronounces the woes to be experienced by those who represent a perversion of the covenantal relationship. To this sort of disobedience Yahweh's answer has been a firm reproach. In the Genesis account of the fall God does not revoke any of the functions and purposes which he designated for man in the creation. He maintains these functions but imposes restrictions and difficulties which man must surmount to fulfill his purpose. This is Yahweh's method of purging sin and the temptation to do evil from human existence. Likewise in the eighth century prophecies against Israel for covenantal

²Matthew 23:1-36; Mark 12:37b-40; Luke 20:45-47.

disobedience comes the warning that Yahweh will take whatever steps are necessary to find in Israel that measure of righteousness necessary to the covenantal relationship. This includes multiplying Israel's problems in order to purge her of her wandering affections. Thus Israel is continually driven back to covenantal obedience through some attempt of Yahweh to find in her the righteousness sought from his high priestly nation.

The law has had this position of the guardian of Israel's faithfulness since post-exilic times. As I mentioned in Chapter II, the codification of Israel's laws and the concept of covenant extant in Deuteronomy is the direct result of Israel's fear that Yahweh's displeasure will occur again because of her unfaithfulness. Hence the law becomes the central distinguishing aspect of the covenant from the time of the return from exile. To the casual observer it might seem that Israel has forsaken the covenant concept altogether in favor of a pietistic legal system which was originally only a small portion of the covenant relationship. Such is not the case. Israel has been badly shaken by her experience in exile. Her vow is never to precipitate the need for such correction again.

Nehemiah, as previously cited, exemplifies the tradition responsible for the formulation of the P Code.

Professor Simpson³ sees the P Code as a sort of commentary on the JED tradition as seen in the light of Israel's recent sufferings during exile and as encountered upon the return to Jerusalem. Nehemiah and all Israel is faced with the problem of recovering the lost position of favor with Yahweh and the full realizing that Israel has erred. The eighth century prophets failed because Israel believed that Yahweh would not destroy his holy people regardless of what they did. Not even in the sixth century did Judah fully understand why the Northern Kingdom had fallen. Thus they, too, went to the same sort of destruction. The Sinaitic covenant as reinterpreted in the period of the Davidic monarchy so emphasized the permanence of the covenantal bond that Israel overlooked the possibility of Yahweh's discipline for disobedience. Yet through the Assyrian conquest and the Babylonian captivity and exile Israel discovers that her responsibility is such that Yahweh will not pardon her for the slightest wandering from her function. The final redaction in the Hexateuch represents a summary of all Israel's history from the time of her creation. It is the Priestly Code, the final material assimilated into the Hexateuch, which gives Israel her legalism evident in the time of Jesus. This Code bears the total responsibility of re-evaluating all other

³C. A. Simpson, "The Growth of the Hexateuch", The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. I, pp. 197ff.

previously written material on the covenant relationship. It modifies the JE concept of Israel's call through her history by challenging Israel's understanding of the irrevocably established path of her own history. It corrects the lethargic concept of the importance of law which led to the "finding" of the Book of Law⁴ during the reign of King Josiah. Though Josiah rent his clothing and imposed upon the people the demand for more obedient regard for the law, the decay was too advanced to be halted so simply. In spite of Josiah's attempt to reverse God's judgment against Israel, Zephaniah prophesies that it is already too late to correct the wrongs done when Israel has turned to other gods.

It is difficult to find any historical justification for the Christian tradition which addresses Yahweh as "Father" from the writings of the period responsible for revising Israel's view of the binding nature of the law. The D Code, devised as a means of providing the people of the North with an ethical handbook for their relations with each other and with Yahweh, failed in the North and failed again when it was employed by Josiah in the "Deuteronomic Reform". It failed because it did not communicate the imminent concern and earnest demands of Yahweh. The

⁴II Kings 22.

conquest and the exile were the necessary proof of the immediacy of the relationship. Thus while the Priestly Code took this into account fully, it did less than justice to Israel's traditional concept of Yahweh's nature. By this I mean that the Priestly Code so tried to reverse the notions that God would not punish his disobedient people that it became hypersensitive to the personal pleasure or displeasure of Yahweh. The Priestly Code is a methodical presentation of Israel's responsibilities to Yahweh centering in Yahweh's power and authority. It does this so thoroughly that a certain element of personal responsibility and freedom is sacrificed to attain a corporate image of Israel's legal responsibility to Yahweh.

The early Christian prayer formulary⁵ is the result of a specific teaching of Jesus about the fatherhood of God. The Synoptic Gospels represent Jesus using this term frequently to refer to Yahweh, either in the sense of "my Father" or "your heavenly father". Since the Old Testament usage of "abba" is limited to six passages⁶ in which it is clearly used as an alternate name for Yahweh, there appears to be some basis for Jesus' use of the figure

⁵Galatians 4:6; Romans 8:15; Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:40-46. see also Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4.

⁶Psalms 68:5; Psalm 89:26; Isaiah 9:6; Isaiah 63:16; Isaiah 64:8; Jeremiah 3:19.

though this was not the prevalent liturgical or pietistic description of the nature of Yahweh's Lordship even in the time of Jesus. Three of these references, those contained in Deutero-Isaiah and Jeremiah, are of the period in which the Priestly Code was being formulated. Since these deal with the Creation and Patriarchal Covenants they are of particular interest. Because P endeavored to reassess the meaning of all that had preceded it in Israel's history in terms of the exilic and post-exilic experience it is likely that in this consideration should be found a trace of the concept of the Fatherhood of God. In addition to this, the other three references, speaking of the kingly fatherhood, Davidic Covenant and Messianic expectation, associate the Fatherhood of God with the enthronement of the king as the representative of God in which the king receives the authority of the father image. At the same time the eschatological implication is that as the Day of the Lord arrives, the Kingdom of God is established on earth, then will the Fatherhood of God toward Israel be manifested fully. This too relates the Fatherhood of God in terms of Israel's history for in no case is the descent from the Patriarchs overlooked. Hence, it might be said that God is represented as the Father of the fathers of the nation, or in terms of Isaiah 9:6, the Everlasting Father.

As the Synoptics report Jesus' use of abba in many instances, they provide a clue to Jesus' thinking on the subject. Because many of Jesus' teachings arise out of his objections to the popular understanding of the Priestly Code, he teaches in a fashion which comments upon the JED tradition of Israel as the P Code itself had done. In this he does not abrogate the teachings of the Priestly tradition so much as he examines the reasoning which it employs. Hence, the covenantal concepts held by the prophets of the exilic period strongly influence the teachings of Jesus. If there existed any tradition concerning the Fatherhood of God in terms similar to those of Jesus this probably was due to the fact that Jesus did not draw his entire understanding of Fatherhood from the employment of the concept in scripture.

Through the figure of Fatherhood we again come into contact with the historicity of Jesus' teaching on the covenant. As the Synoptics represent Jesus' concept of covenant stemming from his membership in Israel and his complete concurrence with Israel's faith, so also does his teaching reflect his study of scripture and his general knowledge of Israel's historical heritage. Because Jesus does show some degree of scholastic training⁷, at least so

⁷Matthew 13:54-58; Mark 6:1-6; Luke 4:16-30.

far as being able to read the scripture is concerned, we may assume that he was at least familiar with the Fatherhood image in scripture. Nevertheless it is evident that his use of the figure is more dependent upon a literal tradition of interpreting the title than upon any actual scriptural usage. Thus, as the Synoptics picture Jesus being in full accord with the covenantal concept seen in both scripture and the traditions of Israel, it is likely he concurred in the concept of Yahweh's nature commensurate with all Israel's experience until the time of post-exilic reassessment. It is doubtful that Jesus introduced a new concept in using abba to speak to God or that his use suggests a disagreement in theological concepts of Yahweh's nature. Yet it is certain that he altered the context in which the term was used. As Jeremias points out,⁸ it is the unique position of Jesus which allows Christians to employ the figure of the Father as they do. This is a valid summary of the witness of the Synoptists. Though we see Jesus as Christ introducing this conceptual relationship as the key to understanding the new means of covenantal access, the Synoptics testify to this fact only as they witness to the total mission of Jesus and not as they record his specific teachings. In no way

⁸Joachim Jeremias, "Abba, Dear Father", Hewett Lectures, Episcopal Theological School, Cambridge, Mass., October 14, 1963.

do the Synoptic Gospels make a dogmatic statement of the relationship of Christ to God the Father except when interpreted in the light of the later attempts of the Church to assign meanings with which it can understand and convey the nature and work of Christ. For this reason Dr. Jeremias' lecture must be tempered by the knowledge that his is an interpretation of the Synoptic message and not a paraphrase of it.

II. THE EUCHARISTIC WORDS OF JESUS

As concluded in Chapter III, there is no such thing as the "new" covenant, at least for the prophetic mind. The concept of covenant has remained almost the same throughout the history of Israel. The most serious and complete departures from the mainstream of covenantal understanding and devotion were those which preceded and provoked the eighth century conquest by Assyria and the sixth century conquest and exile by Babylon. The departure from the covenantal relationship was characterized by Israel's refusal to heed Yahweh's demands in the law. Hence Israel was compelled to return to her rightful covenant function. This does not suggest continuity--discontinuity in the covenant because of Israel's unfaithfulness.

Traditionally biblical scholars have applied the term "covenant" to the relationships which resulted from

Yahweh's contacts with people such as Abraham, Noah, Moses, David, when such contacts influenced the history of Israel. This traditional interpretation of the various agreements between representative Israelites and Yahweh are rightfully called covenants since they reflect Yahweh's love through the promises made by and to Yahweh as a result of these contracts. Since they reflect Israel's election once and for all as well as Yahweh's act of beginning again to love Israel as seen from the "two-way" promises, these situations fulfill all the necessary prerequisite of the covenant definition. However, because these are only revisions, revelations, further clarifications of the original covenant understood by the prophets to have been instituted with Israel in the Patriarchal period (notably with Abraham) they are not rightly called covenants. The better term for these relationships would be "institutions" for they both speak of Yahweh's re-institution of the covenantal relationship as well as of the institutional changes resulting in the religion of Israel. Hence, in speaking of the "new" covenant we are using a misnomer since this covenant is no newer than any other of the "institutions" at their inception. A better term for denoting the covenant established by Christ would be the "Messianic" covenant--a title which was never very popular in Christian circles. Though some biblical interpreters claim it is necessary to emphasize the

continuity--discontinuity aspect of the Messianic institution in order to demonstrate its full import, there is a growing group who believe this to be an unnecessary attempt to differentiate between the legal covenant of Judaism and the personal covenant of Christianity. The more realistic interpretation is that which sees the Messianic institution as the culmination of the covenant relationship abrogating the need for further institutions or for reviving past ones through reassessment of their terminology. Hence within the covenant relationship there have existed a number of institutions each with its own provisions which accumulate from one institution to the next, each possessing a measure of that which preceded it. The last of these institutions is that resulting from the sending of the Messiah to Israel. (This is the culmination of the covenant relationship.) This is the fulfillment of the promise made by Yahweh. There is now no time left for Israel to prepare herself for her covenantal role. The time has come when the need for preparation has been superceded by the need for the actual practice of covenant. And for Israel this means actively witnessing.

The actual words of Jesus, "This is my body" and "This is my blood" as reported by the Synoptics bear a special significance as the actual foundation of the Messianic institution. Because the Messianic covenant is

based upon the unique purpose of one person, his relation to God and the promises made by him and about him by the prophets, it is a "new" covenant because through the Messianic covenant, the term covenant has a new significance. The Synoptic Gospels understand the covenant relationship as altered by Jesus to be dependent upon his person and not upon his teachings or laws as were previous covenantal qualifications. The actual meaning of the Eucharistic words can be discovered only through concentrating on the meaning of Body and Blood. The usual explanation of these words is that which takes into account the Exodus experience of Israel. These two statements parallel the anamnesis of the Exodus in Jewish liturgies for the Passover. By remembering the bread which their fathers ate in the land of Egypt, the bitter herbs and the rest, the faithful actually participated in the Exodus by this particular form of remembrance. In this lies the traditional understanding of Christ's Eucharistic Presence: as he is remembered he comes to be really present. Thus the is verb becomes central to participating in what is accomplished both for Israel in the Exodus and for the Church in Christ. This is signifies the efficacy of the act of remembering.

Witness and anamnesis are closely tied in Passover liturgics. The remembrance of the Exodus is inseparably associated with Israel's holy function. Such a remembrance

is to be listed among those mighty acts of Yahweh to which Israel is indebted for her existence. As in those Hittite suzerainty treaties recalling what Yahweh did for Israel in this instance, Israel has but little hope of escaping Yahweh's expectations. Israel benefitted by Yahweh's mercy on her while she was in Egypt. Now it is Israel's turn to witness to this characteristic goodness of Yahweh. Hence the descendants recall their fathers' tribulations in Egypt and in the wilderness in this way witnessing to Yahweh's Lordship.

In phrasing the Eucharistic words using the is form for the statement, Jesus clearly borrows from the existing Passover Seder remembrances. In recording this the Synoptic Gospels include a ready made means of remembrance. Indeed in this sense of the use of is one need not be reminded to "do this in remembrance of me" unless one is not familiar with the method of remembrance practiced in the Seder. Hence the Synoptic writers include a double command to continue the remembrance. We may conclude on the basis of this that the intent of these words is to perpetuate a memorial of Jesus among his followers. Still in this case it is doubtful if Jesus was aware of actually being about to establish a new relationship. Even this late in his career we find no specific Messianic consciousness in the teachings of Jesus except those which were read in by the Synoptists

and the early church through the faith in the post-resurrection experiences. It is likely that the injunction to "do this in remembrance of me" is the evangelists' evaluation of the meaning of the words of institution. Hence the phrases "this is my body" and "this is my blood" constitute the institution rather than the command to "do this".

In employing the anamnesis method of the Passover, Jesus maintained a "theology" of covenantal community. Because these words are reminiscent of the Passover observance they are anchored to the tradition of covenant in Israel. One should not represent Jesus as the second lawgiver in comparison with Moses on the basis of the association with the Passover inherent in these words. Jesus speaks of the continuing life of Israel by employing these words. The remembrance is no longer simply a remembrance of the experience in Egypt. Jesus intends his followers to perpetuate his memory in this way by urging them to remember his association with the covenanted people and his interpretation of the meaning of Israel's history. Jesus acts as the interpreter of the covenant tradition in his age even as the Priestly interpreters evaluated JED for their time. This is the basis for employing these words of anamnesis. "This is my body" and "this is my blood" are the form and basis of

a covenantal anamnesis. Used in this way no further command to "do this" is necessary.

Jesus intended the focus to be the actual means of making the anamnesis, his body and blood. As the Passover anamnesis is accomplished only through the use of material means such as bitter herbs, wine, water, unleavened bread, so also Jesus intended the wine and bread to be the actual means of reconstructing his memory. In the recitation of the Passover remembrances the materials employed are taken to be the actual thing they represent. In speaking in this manner Jesus intended his remembrance to be accomplished in the same way. Hence as the body and blood were the means by which Jesus' contemporaries recognized him in his earthly life, these are to be the means which the church employs to recognize him. Such a recognition depends upon the covenantal relationship. As the Passover materials had special significance only in their liturgical context, the means of recognizing the covenantal relationship within the fellowship of the Church are those which Jesus employed to perpetuate his memory among his followers. In this way the terms of witness to the Messianic covenant are determined. The perpetuation of the witness of this covenant depends upon performing the remembrance "until his coming again".⁹

⁹Book of Common Prayer, p. 80.

The goal of the Messianic covenant is related to the goal for all previous covenantal institutions. The demand of the covenant relationship is to witness to the sovereignty of God. Being the holy people means being the witness to the mighty acts of God as accomplished through the circumstances which precipitated them. The Eucharistic words are the means of remembering the ultimate mighty act and of bearing witness to the efficacy of it. Though the Synoptic Gospels maintain the secrecy of Jesus' mission, they testify to his silent consciousness of it. The personal encounter with Jesus of Nazareth and his understanding of the covenant relationship is prerequisite to knowledge of the Christ of God. It is this which compels the Church to perpetuate the memory of Jesus who is thus recognized as the Christ. Only by viewing the entire message and mission of Jesus and by encountering him in his reality is the Messianic covenant discovered to be manifested through him. It is the testimony of the Synoptic Gospels that only through such personal encounter with the mission and message of Jesus and with the man Jesus himself is the concept of Messianic covenant to be developed in human understanding. For this reason, the Synoptics seem to imply, Jesus instituted a means of remembrance. Bearing witness to the Messianic covenant depends upon being related to Jesus as he is known through his body and blood.

He gives his body and blood for the purpose of fulfilling his mission, being a witness himself to the sovereignty of God.

It is a difficult task for the church to explain its role in terms of the covenantal consciousness of Jesus. This problem arises from the fact that Jesus' mission was solely to Israel. Since this is the case it is difficult to account for the universalization of the Gospel message as practiced by the Church. The most frequently cited authority for such missionary action on the part of the Church is the "Great Commission",¹⁰ Since this reported saying is peculiar to Matthew, it appears to be the evangelist's personal evaluation of the Messianic covenant attained through personal encounter. Since Matthew reports this as a post-Resurrection saying, it is obviously one which has been subject to the interpretation of the reporter. Jesus did not instruct Israel in matters of world mission during his lifetime. His mission taught Israel's proper function in the covenant relationship and did not mention any extension of covenantal boundaries. Still, because Israel's covenantal purpose was to witness to Yahweh's sovereignty before the nations of the world, there is reason to believe that Jesus would be sympathetic toward such an interpretation

¹⁰Matthew 28:16-20.

of his mission. His actions and words to the Syrophoenician woman¹¹ indicate that he was at least sympathetic toward those outside the covenant. Jesus, in effect, teaches that membership in Israel, to whom he is sent, is a matter of faith. The total picture created by this report in the Synoptics in conjunction with Israel's high priestly function among nations would indicate that the exegete should maintain a stand favorable to the broadest interpretation. Due to the teachings of Jesus on covenantal responsibility it is probable that Israel's function accomplished by admitting Gentiles to the covenantal relationship would be acceptable to him if it reflected honest witness on the part of Israel and honest faith on the part of those admitted.

If one can understand Israel's role to witness for the purpose of converting the world to the worship of Yahweh, one can certainly understand the universalizing influence of Jesus' ministry. Certainly the testimony of the Fourth Gospel is to the acceptance of the missionary role on the part of the Church. Indeed the existence of the Fourth Gospel testifies to this fact. Yet one can hardly postulate missionary endeavor for Israel on the evidence of the spread of Christianity. Mission is not necessarily among Judaism's

¹¹Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30.

legacies for Christianity. The source of the universalization of the covenantal concept in Christianity lies in Jesus' ministry to the Syrophoenician and the confessional character of faith which he urged in a number of instances. One characteristic of healing miracles is the necessity of belief on the part of the sick person in order to be cured. For this reason one can further assume that membership in Israel for Jesus was determined by what one believed and not where one was born. For this reason the Messianic covenant is open to all who will accept God's sovereignty as demonstrated through Jesus Christ. Thus the means of remembrance, the body and blood of Christ, are witnesses not only to the Messiahship of Jesus and the sovereignty of God but are also the means of assisting in the task of enabling humanity to encounter Christ personally. Thus Christ comes not only to humanity experientially through the Holy Ghost but through the materials by which he is remembered. Hence the Church is charged with the necessity of living under the conditions of the Messianic covenant which is a universal covenant because of Israel's duty to witness to the world coupled with Jesus' conviction that the true Israel was composed of those who held the faith of Israel. Hence the Synoptics' report of the urgency of believing, in the healing miracles, for example, points to their understanding of the meaning of Israel as expanded by the mission of Jesus.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Jesus' view of the covenantal relationship is central to the understanding of his mission. His purpose was to awaken Israel to the function which was hers under the conditions of the covenant relationship from the time of its conception in the traditions of the Northern tribes. In accomplishing his purpose Jesus re-defined Israel according to belief rather than according to birth. Though this re-definition is only intimated by his sayings, it is fully developed in the tone and intent of the Synoptic Gospels. Because the witness of the Synoptic Gospels is derived from an interpretation of the meaning of Jesus' life and ministry through the personal encounter of the evangelists, some portion of Jesus' covenantal awareness is accessible to the exegete only as he employs the tools of his study. Hence it is unwise to attempt to limit the degree to which the covenantal concept pervaded Jesus' ministry. Because Jesus was a Jew and because so many of his teachings were directed toward a right understanding of Israel's responsibility, the nature of God, the place of the law and the role of the individual within the social structure of Israel, he necessarily dealt with the prophetic concept of covenant extensively. His role was that of

critic and reformer. Jesus interpreted the meaning of Israel in such a way as to emphasize the personal responsibility of the believer. To all of this the Synoptics testify.

Jesus was rejected by official Judaism because of the acceptance with which his teachings were received among the am-ha-aretz. The Synoptics are sufficiently vague as to the number of people present at the trial so that one may assume that those present to accuse him were primarily the members of the Sanhedrin. Because of the fear of alarming the people at the time of the Passover¹ we can assume this to be the case. Had the trial come to the attention of many of the common people among whom Jesus had taught extensively there would have been such a possibility of rioting. Hence, one must assume that the Messiahship of Jesus was not recognized by official Judaism. The offensive quality of Jesus proved to be his teachings and the influence these had among the common people. Because Jesus dared to question the official interpretation of the place of law in the covenant he was regarded as an undesirable person. His role of critic and reformer offended the religious officials. Thus, through his teachings he grew to be regarded as personally offensive.

¹Matthew 26:1-5; Mark 14:1-2; Luke 22:1-2.

The personal relationship of Jesus to the covenant is to be discovered only through the encounter of Jesus the Christ. In order to understand the nature of Jesus' authority to teach and interpret as he did, one must partake of the revelation offered by the overall picture of Jesus in the Synoptics. The exact nature of Jesus' Messiahship is revealed as the Synoptic story unfolds. Only as one receives the full impact of Jesus' mission does the Messianic authority become clear. Only with the realization of the meaning of Jesus' person does the authority of his teachings seem unavoidable.

The Synoptics represent Jesus as a loyal Jew unwilling to alter the concept of chosenness. Because he had as his mission the project of returning Israel to a right understanding of her role, official Judaism took him to be a revolutionary. Jesus added nothing new to the faith of Israel. He corrected it according to the purest traditions of the JED period. In this he did not reject the Priestly Code. Rather he rejected the popular interpretation of it. Hence he did, as the Priestly Code authors intended to do, interpret Israel's call to witness in a given situation.

The Messianic Covenant does not abrogate all previous covenantal institutions. It re-interprets them in terms of personal involvement in Israel's purpose. Such a reinterpretation is the result of Christ's coming. Had the

necessity of re-evaluation not manifested itself in the Advent of Christ, the traditions of Judaism would have stood unquestioned. Because of the authority of Jesus as Christ were the traditions of post-exilic teaching questioned.

Jesus did not break an old covenant. He caused it to be renewed in different terms. Instead of maintaining the law as a means of being worthy to witness, Israel is now free to witness because the time has been accomplished in which Israel must assume the full responsibility of her role. There can be no question of continuity or discontinuity. Christ came to renew the covenant with Israel, not to abolish it. The covenantal relationship is interminable, though it is capable of being altered. Previously, covenantal institutions altered the understanding of the relationship by offering new statutes and renewing the central condition. Under Christ the promises and condition are renewed, but the institution is in a personal form rather than in a legal form. Only through encountering Jesus revealed to be the Messiah in the totality of his teaching and work do we come to be associated with the Christ of faith and with the covenant offered in his body and blood.

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